

CLAIMS

1. A content scanning system for electronic documents such as emails comprising:

- 5 a) a link analyser for identifying hyperlinks in document content;
- b) means for causing a content scanner to scan objects referenced by links identified by the link analyser and to determine their acceptability according to predefined rules, the means being operative, when the link is to an object external to the document and is determined by the content analyser to be acceptable, to retrieve the external object and modify
- 10 the document by
- b1. embedding in it or attaching to it the retrieved copy of the object; and
- b2. replacing the link to the external object by one to the copy embedded in, or attached to, the document.

15 2. A system according to claim 1 wherein the link analyser a) and means b) are operative to recursively process links identified in such external objects.

3. A system according to claim 2 in which only a maximum depth of recursion is permitted and the document is flagged as unacceptable if that limit is reached.

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4. A system according to claim 1, 2 or 3 wherein acceptable retrieved objects are encoded into MIME format.

5. A system according to any one of the preceding claims wherein if any linked-to object is determined by the content scanner to be unacceptable the document is flagged or modified to indicate that fact.

5 6. A method of content-scanning electronic documents such as emails comprising:

a) using a link analyser for identifying hyperlinks in document content;

b) using a content scanner to scan objects referenced by links identified by the link analyser and to determine their acceptability according to predefined rules, the means
10 being operative, when the link is to an object external to the document and is determined by the content analyser to be acceptable, to retrieve the external object and modify the document by

b1. embedding in it or attaching to it the retrieved copy of the object; and

b2. replacing the link to the external object by one to the copy embedded in,
15 or attached to, the document.

7. A method according to claim 6 wherein the steps a) and b) are used recursively to process links identified in such external objects.

20 8. A method according to claim 7 in which only a maximum depth of recursion is permitted and the document is flagged as unacceptable if that limit is reached.

9. A system according to claim 6, 7 or 8 wherein acceptable retrieved objects are encoded into MIME format.

10. A method according to any one of claim 6 to 9, wherein if any linked-to object is determined by the content scanner to be unacceptable the document is flagged or modified to indicate that fact.

5 11. A content scanning system for electronic documents substantially as hereinbefore described and with reference to the accompanying drawings.

12. A method of content-scanning electronic documents substantially as hereinbefore described and with reference to the accompanying drawings.